

CAMPING FOR BLIND ADULTS

Case, Maurice

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HOUSE FOR THE BLIND**



Boating is an exciting and ever popular activity for blind campers.

The following material, prepared to be of use in the orientation of the new counselor, at Camp Lighthouse, who has had little experience with handicapped people, is presented in the hope that it will be of help to students and other workers with the blind.

What happens to a person who becomes blind? What kind of person is one who has never seen? What kind of camp is Camp Lighthouse?

Camp Lighthouse is one of two summer camps owned and operated by the Lighthouse of The New York Association for the Blind. It is located on the south New Jersey coast, about ninety miles from New York City.

Our campers are people, men and women of all sizes and shapes, some intelligent, others dull, some quick, some slow, the strong and the weak, the aggressors and the meek, differing from one another as all human beings differ. There is, however, a strong bond of identity among blind people. This is based not so much on the fact of sharing a similar physical handicap as upon the experiencing of similar instances of the general lack of understanding of the blind.

Camp Lighthouse was built in 1926, and is a centralized camp with fifteen buildings spaced in a large circle on one acre of cleared area. These consist of a dining-hall, social hall, ten cabins, two washrooms and a garage-tool storage building. Thick, impenetrable woods surround the camp on the west, north and south. To the east is an extensive saltwater meadow which separates the camp from the beach and Barnegat Bay. We reach the beach for swimming and boating by a four-hundred-yard railed boardwalk which has been constructed over the soft marshland. Because of the thousands of acres of sea level woods and meadows, Ocean County is mosquito territory. Mosquito control has been a difficult and continuing problem. Outdoor evening programs are almost impossible.

Our camp buildings are sturdy, well-built and com-

MR. CASE, member of the American Association of Group Workers, recreation director at the Lighthouse, has been the director of Camp Lighthouse for the past ten years.

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CAMPING

pletely screened. Standing in the center of camp, facing west, the dining-hall is directly in front at the number twelve position on a clock. Going around to the north, clockwise, are cabins one through five and the north washroom. This is the women's side of camp. Continuing around to the east, the play field is at three o'clock and the social hall at six o'clock. Then to the south are cabins six through ten and the south washroom. This is the men's side of camp. Camp Lighthouse is a small camp, and we average thirty-six campers per a two-week session. The largest number we can accommodate is forty-six.

Purposes

Many of our blind and visually handicapped campers lead limited lives in terms of mobility, variety of new experiences, and independence in choice of social and recreational activities. To a blind city person outdoor activity, if at all possible, means dependence on others for guiding, or the strain and tension of traveling alone, then trying to compete with and adjust to sighted persons who are out for recreation, too.

At the camp there is a minimum of dependence in moving about and in participation in a varied program of outdoor activities. As already indicated, the locations of buildings, play areas, dock and beach are simple. The paths are well-marked, the boardwalk is straight and safe.

For many of our campers, camp is the most significant change in a year of routine living.* It means so much to a blind person, even if it is for two weeks only, to get away from relatives who are worn by the extra little services a blind person requires; to be able to go outdoors at will; to be able to choose from a variety of recreational activities; to have three good meals a day in a friendly, easy atmosphere; and to be accepted as an individual.

Socialization is one of our important objectives. Blind people tend to be isolated from, and to isolate themselves from, normal group relationships. Our permissive, flexible

* See "A Part of My Life," in RECREATION, June 1952, by Jacob Twersky, blind author whose first novel, *The Face of the Deep*, will be published this month.



KINGWOOD CENTER

T. E. Rivers

CHARLES K. KING's dream of a program of life enrichment for the people of Mansfield, Ohio, is now to be realized. Mr. King died last May, and his former home, Kingwood, and related buildings, forty-six acres of grounds, together with a very generous endowment have been set aside "to provide a well arranged program for educational, community and recreational activities." This quoted phrase is from Mr. King's trust agreement which outlines, in detail, how he desired to have his home and the accumulated treasure of his lifetime given to the people.

It has been a very great satisfaction to me to read this final document, as well as to look over our NRA file and the record of how this dream took shape in the mind and heart of Charles K. King, for it was not an impulsive act. "Kingwood Center" is the result of a generous desire plus careful study, on his part and on the part of his associates, many field visits, conferences, careful advice of lawyers, financiers and workers in the National Recreation Association who dreamed with Mr. King.

In 1936, in conference with Fred M. Riddleberger, Mr. King's attorney in Cleveland, the association proposed: conferences with Mr. King in Mansfield; visits to the association's headquarters and to other community projects; a study, by the NRA, of the needs of Mansfield, and an analysis of how Mr. King's property might best help to serve these needs. Mr. King was the most eager of all to explore, to consult and to expand his own idea so that the ultimate program would be of the greatest value to the people of Mansfield and to the State of Ohio.

About a year later, the association made a study of Mansfield. E. Clark Worman, did the detailed field work, and many others on the staff were consulted.

It was interesting to see Mr. King's vision take shape as time went on. He talked first of an "Education Center." We soon learned that Mr. King had a deep interest in gardening, nature, music, drama and art. After thoroughly discussing the relationship of education to recreation he stated that what we meant by recreation was really what he had in mind when he originally spoke of education. He was impressed with L. P. Jacks' book, *Education Through Recreation*, which seemed to give him a satisfactory philosophical background for the things he wanted to do.



C. K. King

in the framework.

He appreciated the values to the people, not only of seeing and hearing the best in music and drama, but also of having a chance to participate themselves. He put careful thought on priorities. He wanted to start the program with what was already available, his home and gardens, and then add to it. From his analysis the endowment, at that time in the late thirties, would be adequate for what he called the "first unit." He hoped and believed that there would be funds for the whole project.

Basically, Kingwood Center is to provide a well-rounded program of educational and recreational activities for the people of Mansfield. The first step will be the development of the gardening and nature activities. When this has been "creditably developed" the trustees are to erect a building suitable for carrying on other aspects of the program.

The project is well endowed, managed by a board of trustees consisting of George L. Draffin, William A. Springer, Lowell Bourns, D. O. Meese and B. F. McLean, and will be under the executive direction of Dr. R. C. Allen, horticulturist of broad experience, who began work there on April 1.

As early as 1939 Mr. King considered starting this program before his death. We ourselves urged this because of the satisfaction he might experience in helping to launch and work out the plans he had so carefully developed. He finally ruled this out, however, believing that at his age he was not up to facing all the problems involved.

Charles K. King has joined the increasing number of men and women who have such faith in the recreation movement that they have given large sums for the purpose of enriching the lives of others through music, drama, nature, arts and crafts, sports and other leisure-time programs.

Kingwood Center was well conceived and carefully planned. The National Recreation Association is proud to have had a share in this notable community service and will watch with great interest its implementation in the life of Mansfield.



for Blind Adults



Players eagerly await "Go" signal from referee, Dr. Platt.

program encourages wholesome social relationships. There is a lot of friendliness, easy talking, laughing, and inner relaxation.

We try to interest our campers in learning skills within their competence as individuals and as handicapped persons. We have found it unnecessary to attempt the spectacular or the bizarre. If we have to prove anything, we want to prove that our campers are people. With activities such as swimming, boating, hiking, dancing, outdoor games, indoor table games, group singing, social group games, cabin care, and just moving about outdoors, there is more than enough content to meet the needs and wishes of our campers.

Although the average stay can be of only two-weeks duration, some real and lasting adjustments and accomplishments have their origins in the relationships and skills begun at Camp Lighthouse.

Campers

Professional workers in our field refer generally to all our campers as "blind." It is immediately obvious, however, that about three campers out of five have some us-

able vision. These partially sighted persons are visually handicapped to the extent of approximately eighty per cent loss of visual efficiency.

Campers with the most vision are not necessarily the most adequate and independent campers. The extent to which a person accepts himself as he is; the extent to which he develops good attention, association and retention techniques; the extent to which he supplements the little seen with what he hears, smells, feels, and his muscles remember—these determine his general adequacy and independence. Some of our totally blind campers require no assistance except in situations where accident and injury are possible.

There is general agreement among psychologists that about ninety per cent of what we know comes through our visual experiences. This is why it is so much more difficult for a blind person to adjust himself to the natural and social environment which in our society is so dynamic and complex. Through necessity, practice, and education a blind person learns to utilize the other senses as effectively as possible. However, there is much in our environment too large, too small, too hot, too cold, too delicate and too dangerous to touch and handle. Many things make no sound, have no odor. Even aside from this, a blind camper could not possibly hear and feel everything he might and should know about the things around him. Therefore, blind people have to depend a great deal on spoken or written description. Added to this dependence on description is the inescapable fact that physical blindness gives a general impression of helplessness, particularly in the area of movement. As a result, many sighted persons are prone to project dependency and helplessness to the total behavior, volition, judgment and emotions of all the blind persons.

Blind persons react to this categorizing with strong aggression, showing hostility, irritability, anger, and sometimes defiant, irrational independence. Others react with regression, becoming helpless and almost completely dependent. Those who can adjust to the stereotyped attitude of the sighted, accept, at least consciously, the realistic limitations imposed by blindness. They then proceed to become as adequate as possible in activities in which sight

plays a minor role. The extent to which so many blind persons have been able to achieve adequate status personally, economically, and socially is a great tribute to them as individuals.

Implications for the Counselor

What should the preceding mean to our camp staff? Most important of all is the fact that our campers are individual persons. For the most part they are just average persons who have learned to live with their visual handicap. They are eager to participate in camp activities, and want the assistance of understanding leadership.

There, of course, will be some campers who have not made an adequate adjustment to their handicap. One must remember that patterns of behavior and character have their roots deep in heredity and past experiences. Even a severe shock like blindness will not completely change the basic structure of a personality. These less adequate camp-

program activities. The friendly, confident presence of a counselor is about all that is needed to assure acceptable camper behavior.

Program

In formulating our camp program we had to be mindful of the following facts:

1. Our campers are adults, eighteen to forty-five years of age.
2. Little screening and selectivity is possible; this means that within each group there will be campers who have widely differing backgrounds educationally, culturally and economically.
3. Relative adequacy in adjustment to the handicap varies from person to person.
4. Approximately three out of every five campers have some useful vision.
5. The camp period for each group is only two weeks.
6. The physical setup and location of the camp limits the program to daytime outdoor activities.
7. Our campers are adults and we want them to have a significant part in program planning.

The program framework of a typical Camp Lighthouse day follows:

8:00 A.M.	Reveille
8:30— 9:30	Leisurely breakfast
9:30—10:30	Bed making and bunk cleanup
10:30—12:30	Activities on permissive basis: swimming, boating, sun bathing, fishing, clamping, hiking, berry picking, outdoor games such as baseball, basketball, pushball, horseshoe pitching
12:30— 1:00	Cleanup and relaxation before lunch
1:00— 2:00	Leisurely lunch
2:00— 3:00	Rest period; quiet games, reading and letter writing
3:00— 6:00	Activities similar to the ones in the morning program plus beach hikes, boat trips and town trips
6:00— 6:30	Cleanup and relaxation before dinner
6:30— 7:30	Leisurely dinner
7:30— 9:00	Activities which are less strenuous than those in the preceding activity periods, walk on boardwalk, indoor bowling, indoor table games—cards, checkers, chess, bongo, ping-pong—record playing, group singing; just relaxing and getting ready for the evening program
9:00—11:00	Evening program—planned formal program for Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings; informal unplanned program for Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings
11:30	Taps

A Camp Lighthouse day is a good day; it's an easy day; and it's a long day. We make every effort to give the counselors adequate time off, varying assignments, stimulating meetings and conferences.

To be a happy, worthwhile counselor one must be a healthy, rugged, outdoor person who sincerely likes people. One has to be quite a social person, too, for dancing, group singing, group games and table games are the principal content of our evening programs. One should enjoy good camp meals—because we have them; and one should get a kick out of seeing the campers enjoy them. Above all one must want to be intelligently helpful to those who need understanding assistance.



Singing, to strumming of guitars, enlivens a rainy day.

ers need all the understanding and intelligent help we can give them. For them Camp Lighthouse has to be even more positive and meaningful.

Because of the implications of helplessness which blind people have to face continually, our campers are sensitive about supervision that is either patronizing or authoritative. This type of supervision, particularly from young counselors, seems to be verification of loss of individual and adult status. At the same time, our campers do need some supervision. Regardless of how adequate the adjustment, blindness does increase accident potential; sighted assistance and adaptations are needed in many indoor and outdoor games and camp activities; and then, coeducational camping requires supervision. One must remember also that the campers are our guests and that we, as representatives of the agency, are responsible for their safety and well-being.

Proper supervision at camp is best exercised through genuinely interested participation with the campers in the

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